

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

1. (currently amended) An assembly, comprising:  
an outer race of a constant velocity joint;  
a shaft of an outboard drive axle axially coupled to said outer race, wherein said shaft has an external surface and an external groove circumferentially formed in said external surface of said shaft;  
a retaining element;  
a wheel hub having a first bore and an internal groove circumferentially formed in said first bore for receiving said retaining element, wherein said first bore of said wheel hub telescopingly receives said external surface of said shaft ~~and is held between said outer race and said retaining element~~; and  
a bearing assembly ~~without pre-tensioning~~ and telescopingly received on one of said shaft on said wheel hub,  
wherein said retaining element releasably engages said external groove of said shaft and said internal groove of said wheel hub to axially secure said wheel hub and shaft in both axial directions and imparts no ~~pre-tensioning~~ pre-load on said bearing assembly.
2. (previously presented) The assembly of claim 1, wherein said retaining element is compressively retractable within said external groove of said shaft, and wherein said retaining element and said shaft are telescopingly received in a second bore of said bearing assembly and in said first bore of said wheel hub.
3. (previously presented) The assembly of claim 1, wherein said retaining element is compressively retractable within said external groove of said shaft, and wherein said retaining element and said shaft are telescopingly received in said first bore of said wheel hub.

4. (previously presented) The assembly according to claim 1, wherein said external surface of said shaft has external splines axially engaging internal splines on said first bore of said wheel hub.

5. (previously presented) The assembly according to claim 1, wherein said retaining element is a spring ring.

6. (previously presented) The assembly of claim 1 wherein said wheel hub having an outer surface and a radially extending flange, telescopingly receives a second bore of said bearing assembly on said outer surface and retains said bearing assembly between said outer race and said radially extending flange of said wheel hub.

7. (previously presented) The assembly of claim 1 wherein said bearing assembly comprises a second bore, a first side and a second side, said second bore being telescopically received on said shaft, wherein said first side is adjacent said outer race, and said second side is adjacent said wheel hub.

8. (cancelled)

9. (cancelled)

10. (previously presented) The assembly according to claim 6, wherein said first bore of said wheel hub and said external surface of said shaft have inter-engaging splines.

11. (previously presented) The assembly according to claim 7, wherein said first bore of said wheel hub and said external surface of said shaft have inter-engaging splines.

12. (previously presented) The assembly according to claim 6 further comprising a retaining ring and a steering knuckle having a third bore and a backstop, said steering knuckle telescopingly receiving said bearing assembly in said third bore and retaining said bearing assembly between said backstop and said retaining ring.

13. (previously presented) The assembly according to claim 7 further comprising a retaining ring and a steering knuckle having a third bore and a backstop, said steering knuckle telescopingly receiving said bearing assembly in said third bore and retaining said bearing assembly between said backstop and said retaining ring.

14. (currently amended) An assembly, comprising:  
an outer race of a constant velocity joint;  
a shaft of an outboard drive axle axially coupled to said outer race, wherein said shaft has an external surface and an external groove circumferentially formed in the external surface of said shaft;  
a steering knuckle having a third bore and a backstop;  
a retaining ring;  
a wheel bearing assembly ~~without pre-tensioning~~ and comprising an outer part rotatably coupled by a plurality of bearing elements to an inner part, wherein the inner part has a second bore, a first side and a second side, wherein the outer part of said wheel bearing assembly is fit into the third bore up to the backstop of said steering knuckle and retained by said retaining ring opposite the backstop, the inner part of the wheel bearing assembly is coupled to said shaft and the first side is adjacent to said outer race;  
a retaining element; and  
a wheel hub having a first bore with an internal groove, and a radially extending flange, wherein the first bore of said wheel hub is coupled to the external surface of said shaft and held in an assembled position between the second side of the inner part of said wheel bearing assembly and said retaining element, wherein said

retaining element is engaged in the internal and the external groove of said shaft grooves to axially secure the wheel hub and shaft in both axial directions and imparts no pre-tensioning pre-load on said wheel bearing assembly, and wherein the wheel hub is rotatably drivable within the steering knuckle by the constant velocity joint.

15. (cancelled)

16. (previously presented) The assembly according to claim 14, wherein the first bore of said wheel hub and the external surface of said shaft have inter-engaging splines.

17. (currently amended) In an assembly comprising an outer race of a constant velocity joint, a shaft of an outboard drive axle axially coupled to said outer race, wherein said shaft has an external surface and an external groove circumferentially formed in the external surface of said shaft, and a wheel bearing assembly without pre-tensioning and having a second bore with an internal groove, a retaining element, and a wheel hub having a first bore and a radially extending flange, a method of retaining said wheel hub and said wheel bearing in telescopic relationship with said shaft by said retaining element comprising:

telescoping said shaft inwardly through the second bore of said wheel bearing assembly and the first bore of said wheel hub;

retaining said wheel hub and said wheel bearing assembly on said shaft with an engaged retaining element in the internal and the external groove of said shaft grooves to axially secure the wheel hub and shaft in both axial directions while imparting no pre-tensioning pre-load on said wheel bearing assembly; and

mounting said retaining element on said shaft.

18. (original) The method of claim 17, further comprising compressing said retaining element within said external groove of said shaft while receiving in telescopic relationship said wheel hub onto said shaft.

19. (cancelled)